

Message Text

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SUBJECT: MILITARY TRIBUNAL CONDEMNS 38 TO DEATH BY FIRING
SQUAD

REF: A-186 OF JUNE 4, 1970

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: ON NOVEMBER 15, PRESS REPORTED MILITARY TRIBUNAL HAD SENTENCED 38 PERSONS (TEN STILL AT LARGE) TO DEATH BY FIRING SQUAD FOR PARTICIPATING IN 1970 BURNING OF BARRIOS IN BANTAY, ILOCOS SUR. GROUP INCLUDES SIX PC, AFP SOLDIER AND TWO POLICEMEN. FIFTEEN OTHER DEFENDANTS ACQUITTED. EXTENSIVE MEDIA COVERAGE GIVEN VERDICT SUGGESTS MARCOS MAY BE A) SIGNALING HIS MARTIAL LAW REGIME CAN BE TOUGH IF NEED BE, AND B) WARNING MILITARY HE HAS NO QUALMS ABOUT PUNISHING THOSE OF THEIR NUMBER WHO MISBEHAVE. SENTENCE MUST BE REVIEWED BY PRESIDENT AND THERE POSSIBILITY HE COULD REDUCE OR COMMUTE IT THEREBY FURBISHING HIS IMAGE AS STERN BUT MERCIFUL RULER. END SUMMARY

2. ON NOVEMBER 15, ALL MANILA PAPERS FRONT-PAGED MILITARY COURT'S DECISION TO EXECUTE 38 OF 58 PERSONS FOUND GUILTY IN BANTAY (ILOCOS SUR) ARSON CASE OF MAY 1970. MILITARY COMMISSION #13 HEADED BY COMMODORE GIL FERNANDEZ ANNOUNCED 15 DEFENDANTS HAD BEEN ACQUITTED
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FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE AND 10 OF CONVICTED STILL AT LARGE.

TRIBUNAL NOTED 38 GUILTY INCLUDED SIX PC, ONE AFP SOLDIER, TWO POLICEMEN. REMAINDER CIVILIANS. EXECUTION IS TO BE BY FIRING SQUAD.

3. COURT'S VERDICT HANDED DOWN NOVEMBER 14 AFTER SIX-MONTH TRIAL. CASE AROSE FROM BURNING OF BARRIO IN BANTAY, ILOCOS SUR AFTERNOON OF MAY 22, 1970 (SEE REFAIR). ABOUT 50 RESIDENTIAL HOMES PUT TO TORCH AND ONE OLD WOMAN LOST LIFE (FROM HEART ATTACK.) THOSE CONVICTED ALL SOMETIME BODY GUARDS OF VINCENT (BINGBONG) CRISOLOGO, SON OF FORMER CONGRESSMAN FLORO CRISOLOGO (ASSASSINATED 1970). VINCENT CRISOLOGO AND FORMER ILOCOS SUR GOVERNOR, CARMELING CRISOLOGO WERE TRIED FOR SAME CRIME PRIOR DECLARATION OF MARTIAL LAW. BANTAY INCIDENT, WHICH DOMINATED MANILA PRESS FOR SEVERAL WEEKS IN 1970, WAS EXTREMELY EMBARRASSING TO MARCOS, BECAUSE IT HIGHLIGHTED CENTRAL GOVERNMENT'S INABILITY TO MAINTAIN ORDER EVEN IN PRESIDENT'S OWN BACKYARD.

COMMENT: PROMINENT PRESS PLAY GIVEN TO MILITARY COMMISSION'S DECISION IN CASE MORE THAN FOUR YEARS OLD INTRIGUING. IT COMES ON HEELS OF EXTENSIVE PUBLICIZING OF AMNESTY PROGRAM ANNOUNCED BY MRS. MARCOS IN HONOLULU AND REITERATED IN NEW YORK. MARCOS MAY BE UNDERSCORING FACT THAT DESPITE ITS RELATIVE MILDNESS HIS MARTIAL LAW REGIME IS CAPABLE OF DRACONIAN ACTION WHEN REQUIRED. PRESIDENT MIGHT ALSO BE USING CASE TO EMPHASIZE TO AFP AND PC (SOME OF WHOSE MEMBERS CONVICTED) THEY ARE NOT IMMUNE TO LAW. FINALLY, PRESIDENT MAY BE SIMPLY USING BANTAY INCIDENT TO ILLUSTRATE WHAT POLITICS IN OLD SOCIETY SOMETIMES LED TO, ALTHOUGH ILOCOS SUR POLITICAL WARS RATHER SPECIAL EVEN BY OLD SOCIETY STANDARDS. MILITARY COMMISSION'S DECISION MUST BE REVIEWED BY PRESIDENT. THUS, THERE POSSIBILITY HE MAY DECIDE COMMUTE/OR REDUCE SENTENCE. EXECUTION OF 28 THUGS FOR FOUR-YEAR OLD CRIME IN WHICH ONLY ONE LIFE LOST AND PROPERTY DAMAGE RELATIVELY MINIMAL SEEMS SEVERE AND, DESPITE CHANGES NEW SOCIETY HAS WROUGHT, DISTINCTLY UN-FILIPINO.

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